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RUEHNAG/AMCONSUL NAGOYA 4106  
RUEHKSO/AMCONSUL SAPPORO 7329  
RUEHOK/AMCONSUL OSAKA KOBE 0634  
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SUBJECT: PUBLIC OPINION REGARDING HATOYAMA ADMINISTRATION AND ITS  
POLICIES TO DATE

¶1. (U) The Democratic Party of Japan (DPJ) was swept into power in the Lower House election on August 30 by voters hungry for change after a half century of nearly unbroken rule by a Liberal Democratic Party, which the media judged ineffectual and out of touch with the people. On September 16, the same day the DPJ's Yukio Hatoyama was elected prime minister, he formed a tripartite cabinet with the Social Democratic Party and the People's New Party. In polls conducted by four of Japan's largest newspapers on September 16-17 the cabinet received the second highest inaugural ratings since the dailies began surveys of newly installed cabinets: 77% in the Mainichi poll, 75% in the Yomiuri and Nikkei, and 71% in the Asahi. The support rate was 68.7% in the Sankei/Fuji Network News poll and 72% in the Kyodo News poll. On the other hand, no disapproval rate topped 17%. A poll conducted by the Yomiuri on October 2-4 showed cabinet support was nearly steady, at 71%, down only 4 points from the previous survey.

¶2. (U) The polls disclose that one Hatoyama initiative receiving consistently high support is the goal of slashing greenhouse gas emissions to a level 25% below the 1990 level by 2020. In the Yomiuri poll, 74% supported this goal, and 15% opposed it. The corresponding figures in the Mainichi poll were 69% and 25%. In the recent Yomiuri poll support for this measure was up one point, to 75%. Also receiving high support were allowances for children. A DPJ proposal to give families 26,000 yen (approximately USD 289) per month for each child of middle school age or younger was supported by 58% and opposed by 39% in the Mainichi poll. Corresponding figures in the Yomiuri poll were 60% and 35%. Respondents to the Kyodo poll were less supportive of the measure, 39.1% vs. 28.1%. In the recent Yomiuri poll the figures were 57% and 39%, indicating a slip in support for the subsidy. There was also considerable support for the DPJ's proposal to waive tuition at public high schools and

annually grant from 120,000 to 240,000 yen (USD 1334 to 2681) for every child in a private high school. In the Mainichi poll 61% supported this measure, and 35% opposed it. To the Asahi's question, "Do you think the child allowances should be paid?" 60% answered yes and 30% no.

13. (U) One plank in the DPJ election platform called for non-extension of the law authorizing the Maritime Self-Defense Force's refueling of ships in the Indian Ocean beyond its expiration in January 2009. More respondents supported than opposed this plank, 44% vs. 39% in the Yomiuri poll. In the recent poll by the newspaper the corresponding figures were 48% and 37%, indicating growing support for ending the refueling mission. In response to a question about Japan-U.S. relations in the Asahi poll, 71% said relations would remain unchanged but only 14% said they would worsen. This suggests that concern over the raft of issues including termination of the refueling mission, review of the realignment of U.S. forces in Japan, and advocacy of an equal Japan-U.S. relationship has not engendered widespread concern among the public.

14. (SBU) Comment: The coalition government has sufficient seats in both upper and lower houses of the Diet to push through legislation in the special session to be convened on October 26. But the LDP, the major opposition party, can be expected to sling mud at the DPJ-led government. If that mud sticks, the Hatoyama cabinet's support rate might slip. For example, the LDP might attack the coalition government as indifferent to the feelings of the people of Yamba, Gunma, for halting construction of a dam in their community. While the recent Yomiuri poll shows more people support (44%) than oppose (36%) halting the construction, there is sympathy for the

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local citizens, some of whom left their ancestral homes to make way for the project, and condemnation of the seemingly cold way in which Minister of Land and Infrastructure Maehara responded to their appeals for a reversal of the government's decision. The administration can seemingly put off hard choices about the refueling mission and realignment of U.S. forces at least until the expected arrival of President Obama in mid-November. Whether the government can reach accord with the U.S. without seeming to renege on the DPJ's campaign pledges may also affect the cabinet's support ratings. A further factor is the degree to which Hatoyama can bask in the glow of the popular U.S. President and forge a Yukio-Barack friendship. In conclusion, the Hatoyama cabinet's honeymoon with the Japanese nation looks like it will continue into the near future barring a negative development of a scale big enough to change public sentiment.

ZUMWALT